

**COMPETENCIES, EMPLOYABILITY, MOBILITY  
AND WORK-LIFE INTEGRATION: AN  
ANTECEDENT-OUTCOME STUDY OF “NEW  
CAREERS”**

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## **KECEKAPAN, KEBOLEHKERJAAN, MOBILITI DAN KESEIMBANGAN ANTARA KEHIDUPAN DAN KERJA: SATU KAJIAN PENENTU DAN KESAN KE ATAS “KERJAYA BARU”**

### **ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini dijalankan untuk menerokai kemunculan “kerjaya baru” dalam dunia pekerjaan di Malaysia. “Kerjaya baru” dilihat sebagai beralih jauh daripada kerjaya

tradisi, yang lebih menekankan hierarki dalam satu atau dua organisasi dalam kehidupan kerja seseorang individu. Literatur kerjaya di saentero dunia mula memberi tumpuan terhadap bidang kajian ini, sebagai suatu cabaran baru yang perlu dihadapi dalam mendepani arus globalisasi dan liberalisasi pasaran perniagaan. Kajian ini menggunakan empat (4) pemboleh ubah yang sering digunakan untuk menerangkan perubahan tempat kerja. Pemboleh ubah tersebut, iaitu: kecekapan, kebolehkerjaan, mobiliti dan keseimbangan antara kehidupan dan kerja diuji menggunakan model penentu dan kesan. Kajian ini berkemungkinan merupakan kajian pertama yang meneliti hubungan keempat-empat pemboleh ubah di atas bagi membantu mendapatkan pemahaman yang jelas tentang “kerjaya baru.” Responden terdiri daripada 152 orang graduan lepasan Sarjana dalam Pentadbiran Perniagaan (MBA) yang telah bekerja minimum 3 tahun selepas mereka berijazah, dan kini sedang berkhidmat dalam sektor pembuatan atau perkhidmatan. Data dikumpul secara soal selidik. Untuk mengurangkan kepincangan pada kaedah yang digunakan, penyelia responden juga diminta menjawab satu set soal selidik. Keputusan analisis menunjukkan sokongan yang sederhana bagi hipotesis. Kajian menonjolkan kepentingan kompetensi “tahu bagaimana” dan “tahu siapa” bagi kebolehkerjaan dalam pasaran buruh dalamam dan luaran. Kompetensi ”tahu mengapa” yang menyediakan input motivasi tentang sesuatu kerjaya, menunjukkan dimensi yang berbeza. Perkara ini sepatutnya dipertimbangkan sebagai aspek motivasi yang berbeza, yang perlu dianggap sebagai permulaan kerjaya untuk berubah. Yang menariknya, perubahan sikap manusia terhadap mobiliti fizikal jelas menunjukkan bahawa mereka mempunyai sikap setia pada kerjaya yang sedang disandang daripada berubah melepasi sempadan. Mobiliti fizikal lebih ketara selepas mereka memperoleh MBA. Namun demikian, dalam konteks ini, peralihan di antara industri lebih ketara

daripada peralihan tugas atau peralihan di antara organisasi. Kajian ini berguna kepada majikan, dalam usaha mereka untuk mengekalkan pekerja yang berkecayaan dalam pasaran buruh dalaman. Bagi para pekerja pula, kepentingan kebolehkeraan dalam mengekalkan kerja sedia ada dan pilihan untuk masa depan sepatutnya difahami dengan baik. Kajian ini mendapati bahawa wanita lebih berjaya dalam “kerjaya baru” kerana mereka lebih fleksibel dan lebih peka kepada perubahan di sekitar mereka. Sebaliknya bagi pekerja lelaki, amat merugikan jika mereka beranjak daripada pola kerjaya tradisi.

## **COMPETENCIES, EMPLOYABILITY, MOBILITY AND WORK-LIFE INTEGRATION IN THE “NEW CAREER”: AN ANTECEDENT-OUTCOME STUDY**

### **ABSTRACT**

This study was undertaken to explore the “arrival” of the “new career” at the Malaysian world of work. The “new career” is seen as moving away from the traditional career which emphasized on hierarchical advances in one or two organizations in the work life of an individual. Literature on career all over the world have started to give prominence to this area of study as new challenges are faced in terms of globalization

and liberalization of the trade markets. This study employed four variables which have been used to explain the changes at the workplace. These variables, namely, competencies, employability, mobility and work-life balance were tested in an antecedent-outcome model. This study would perhaps be the first one which has looked at the relationships of the above mentioned variables to help obtain a better understanding of the “new career”. The respondents were made up of 152 Masters in Business Administration (MBA) graduates who have been employed for a minimum of three years after their MBA and are currently employed in the manufacturing or service sectors. Data were collected by means of questionnaires. To reduce common method bias, the immediate supervisors of the respondents were also requested to answer a set of questionnaires. The results from the analyses have indicated moderate support for the hypotheses. The study highlighted the importance of the “knowing how” and the “knowing whom” competencies in order to pursue employability both in the internal and external labour markets. The “knowing why” competencies which provides the motivational input where career is concerned highlighted different dimensions that need to be given in-depth thought as different motivational aspects would need to be looked at as the nature of careers begin to change. Interestingly, the changes in the attitude of men towards physical mobility were obvious in that they portrayed a stronger attitude towards keeping their current job than moving beyond boundaries. Mobility in the physical sense is more obvious after attaining MBA, however, more obvious in this movement is the move between industries more than functional moves or organizational moves. This study would be useful for employers to maintain highly employable employees in the internal labour markets. For the employees, the importance of employability in maintaining their current job and pursuing future options would be

better understood. It can be implied from the study that women fare better in the “new career” as they are more flexible and purpose-driven. Men, on the other hand are more inclined to the traditional career patterns.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

This study was designed to understand how changes worldwide have affected the way career has been defined and understood. It was undertaken in the midst of changes in organizational forms and structure where the need to look at different variables to describe the new, emerging concept of career seemed pertinent. Career is one of, if not, the most important facet of an individual’s life. Most, if not all the decisions one makes in life are related to his/her current or future career. One’s ambitions, choices of courses



or universities and places of work, amongst others, are all related to one's career. Equally important in the study of career is the measure of success as to be successful in career is the aim of most individuals.

The traditional view of career was defined as “the sequence of work-related positions occupied throughout a person's life” (London & Stumpf, 1982:4). The emphasis, on work-related positions, shows that career in the traditional view only had meaning in relation to positions in organizations. Based on the training individuals receive in formal and informal institutions, it is assumed that the needs of individuals, including development needs will be fulfilled in organizations. In the traditional view of career, it is understood that an individual stays throughout or at least a major part of his/her life in a single organization. The hallmark of this type of career is security and the ultimate goal is to climb the proverbial hierarchical ladder up to its highest rung. Success in the traditional career is measured by the advancement or upward progress made in organizations and through higher income levels.

Career as described in the traditional view is no longer common and if changes in the developed countries are used as the yardstick, this type of career would not exist in the future. This is because organizations worldwide are restructuring, de-layering and flattening their hierarchies causing a change in how career is defined. With the changes in organizational forms, individuals do not seem to stay put in one organization but rather move between organizations to gain more skills and experience. Their goals also change as hierarchies flatten and jobs become more insecure. The focus has shifted to self-managed career development instead of organization-managed careers. These changes have led to a new form of career known as the “new career” and in literature it is referred to as boundaryless, protean, portfolio or post-corporate career. Certain

differences in these terms have been highlighted by some researchers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Hall, 2002) however, for the purposes of this study, the term “new career” is used. The “new career” is described as portable as an individual’s success depends on the transfer of skills from organization to organization (Kanter, 1989). As the “new career” can no longer be defined within the confines of one company, it is looked at as being boundaryless (Mirvis & Hall, 1994). At the same time, as the shape of the “new career” changes to accommodate the individual’s personal and work circumstances, it is described as protean (Sturges, Guest & Davey, 2000). The definition of the “new career” is “the individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviours associated with work-related experiences and activities over the span of the person’s life” (Hall, 2002: 12).

The “new career” can be studied from various perspectives. This study intends to use four variables that have been researched on to better understand the concept of the “new career”. These variables are competencies, employability, mobility and work-life balance. The relationships between these variables will be tested empirically to give a better picture of the “new career” and the changes that come with it.

The emphasis in the “new career” is on the individual and not the organization. The change in the focus from the organization to the individual would mean that careers have become less predictable since career paths are not harnessed to a single organization.

Hence, a comprehensive analysis of how these changes have influenced individuals in particular and organizations in general is a vital starting point for all career policies in the future.

Table 1.1 highlights the differences between the traditional view of career (then) and the “new career” (now). The changes from traditional to the “new career” are evident mainly in the private/ corporate sector in many countries around the world.

As the “new career” path is one that is directed by the individual rather than the organization, it is likely for individuals to have a number of shifts in employment and even career interruptions. These shifts and interruptions might not provide employment security, but if well directed can provide a variety of other rewards especially in the area of experience and skill accumulation.

As this is a new area of research and study in Malaysia, the scenario of what is happening around the world and in Malaysia, in terms of career, needs to be highlighted first, before adumbrating on the problem statement. In other words, the problem statement would have as a backdrop the changes in career and work around the world and in Malaysia.

Table 1.1

*Professional Careers Then and Now*

Career Characteristics	Then	Now
Career defined by	The employing organization	The individual
Career Trajectory	Linear, upward	Multidirectional; up, lateral, down, and in/out of organizations
Context	Stable environment supporting tall, multi-level organizations	Dynamic, changing, and sometimes chaotic environment
Relationship with employer	Work with one or two firms over lifespan; “cradle to grave”	Work with multiple firms, crossing the boundaries between functions,

	employment typical	departments, industries, occupations, and countries
Psychological Contract	Exchange of job security for employee's organizational loyalty	Exchange of learning opportunities for high quality performance and commitment to work at hand
Responsibility for career management	The paternalistic organization, which usually offers "one size fits all" programs based on career stage	The individual, who may seek help from career coaches
Learning focused on	Firm specific needs	Maintaining knowledge, skills & abilities to keep marketable
Training and Development	Formal programs to promote organizational-specific knowledge & organizational commitment; amount of training received usually decreases as employee's tenure increases	On-the-job learning, action learning; training may be less for those with short-term work assignments such as project and temporary workers
Performance evaluated by	Proxies of performance such as face-time, willingness to travel and relocate	Actual performance outcomes with no constraints on where work can be performed
High value placed on	Extrinsic rewards	Intrinsic rewards and flexibility

*Source:* Sullivan & Mainiero (2007a)

## 1.2 Changes in Careers around the World

In the United States (US), literature on career is awash with how the traditional career is dead and the "new career" has taken over (Ackah & Heaton, 2004; Arthur, 1994; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Jacoby, 1999; King, 2004). Arthur (1994) wrote about the changes that were taking place in the work context and further discussed the boundaryless career and how the various industries in US were coping with the new phenomenon.

In the United Kingdom, it is reported that mass expansion of higher education between 1988 and 1994 increased not only the supply, but provided a far greater diversity of graduates in the labour market (King, 2003). Employers started having choices and began to supplant jobs done by non-graduates with graduates. Many unemployed graduates found jobs in small and medium enterprises and in many jobs individuals were expected to take responsibility for their own career. Those who had accepted the idea of the “new career” managed their careers in different ways, with great emphasis on preparation for and in pursuit of opportunities outside their current employing organization.

A study conducted in UK in 2007 highlighted a survey conducted on two groups of managers, one in 1997 and the other in 2000, to investigate their commitment to the organization they were currently employed in. The managers surveyed in year 2000 showed much lesser commitment to the organization in which they were employed. Two reasons were given for this observable fact. The first reason was that the managers acquired new, portable knowledge, skills and abilities, which allowed them to be mobile and be able to compete in the wider market. Secondly, their lower commitment was linked to being dissatisfied with the lack of progress opportunities in their current organizations with flatter structures and lesser promotions (Zaleska & de Menezes, 2007).

The changes in career and work were also evident in Asian countries like Japan and Korea. Japan, for example, once boasted of lifetime employment for their employees. This notion was abandoned after the 1990s recession to cut cost.

While recession forces changes in organizations and the labour market in general, intense globalization also encourages large-scale industrial restructuring in

order to stay competitive. This in turn could cause employment insecurity and unemployment. Employees are encouraged to pursue skill upgrading so as to remain functionally flexible to move within and between firms. “Retraining” is a current term used to place emphasis on gaining new skills and knowledge to adapt to the changing needs of organizations. To remain employable and marketable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, employees need to be adaptable and flexible to pursue skill enhancement.

### **1.2.1 The Malaysian Situation**

The Malaysian workforce culture is found to be more attracted to traditional careers with an average tenure of 9.2 years with the current employer (Raduan, Loo, Jegak & Khairuddin, 2006). This finding was based on the observation of executives working in the electric and electronics industry which comprises mostly Japanese companies and the Malaysian workforce was seen to be comparable to the Japanese. The findings in the study were found to be in contrast to the “boundaryless” career concept. However, a study on the hotel industry in Japan found the relationship between the organization and the individual in Japan to be changing dramatically and many young Japanese do not work for a single company any longer. It is becoming more apparent that the “boundaryless” career concept has started to infiltrate the Japanese industries (Yamashita & Uenoyama, 2006). This brings to fore the question as to whether these changes are being experienced in Malaysia.

An earlier study had contrasting findings compared to the study which was just discussed. Ramlee and Abu (2004) had stated that the emergence of a knowledge-based economy worldwide and in Malaysia has brought about a change in the relationship

between employers and employees. The traditional agreement where employees expect a stable and lifelong employment would no longer be applicable in the career world.

To further elaborate the point above, the nature of work in Malaysia, has intensified over recent years. A study on Multi-National Corporations (MNC) showed that organizational changes like downsizing, globalisation and the entry of China into the World Trade Organization (WTO) have put extra pressure on Malaysian industries. Though the term “boundaryless” is not used freely to describe what is happening in some of the Malaysian industries, evidence of changes is obvious. In the construction industry, for example, there is a shift from managing a traditional hierarchical structure to a network of alliances (Juhary, Chew & Tang, 2004). The financial sector also has seen some drastic changes such as mergers, voluntary separation schemes (VSS) and re-sizing since the year 2000 (Arshad, Aminah & Rachel, 2005).

In terms of employment, during the period of the Eighth Malaysia Plan (2000-2005), the rate of growth was an average of 3.3% per annum (Eighth Malaysia Plan, 2000). In the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006-2010), the employment rate is expected to grow at an average of only 1.9% per annum (Ninth Malaysia Plan, 2006). From the figures in Table 1.2, it can be seen that the number of jobs is shrinking in most industries/sectors.

The decline in employment creation could be due to a slowdown in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the manufacturing sector and a shift towards the service sector. The decline could also be because of the changing form of organizations from tall, hierarchical structures to flatter ones and from labour to capital and technology intensive industries. All this has forced the non-competitive or low-end manufactured products out of demand, apart from relocation of manufacturing plants outside Malaysia in search of cheaper labour and raw materials. The Ninth Malaysia Plan further states

that entrepreneurial values have to be inculcated and the mindset of people changed to view self-managed employment as a viable alternative to salaried employment (Ninth Malaysia Plan, 2006). Though in the Ninth Malaysia Plan, self-managed employment is linked only to entrepreneurship, generally in career literature, self-managed employment is placed on the opposite spectrum of organization-managed career. Hence, self-managed career could mean becoming entrepreneurs, gaining employability and/or moving between firms and even industries, gaining knowledge, skills and experience to enhance one's employability and further, one's mobility in the labour markets.

Further, the Malaysian Institute of Economic Research (MIER) indicated jobless growth as one of the main issues Malaysia will be facing in the future (MIER, 2007). Jobless growth refers to the low correlation between Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth and job creation, where the economy of the country is booming but the number of jobs created is very low.

Table 1.2

*Average Annual Growth Rate of Employment by Sectors in Malaysia, 2000-2005 and 2006-2010*

Sector	Average Annual Growth Rate (%)	
	8 <sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan (2000-2005)	9 <sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan (2006-2010) Estimated
Agriculture, Forestry, Livestock & Fishing	-0.2	-1.2
Mining & Quarrying	0.5	0.9